

NO-NO BOY

by John Okada

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Introduction

To my wife Dorothy

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We were talking about the book. We had *been* talking about the book, it seemed, for a very long time, ever since Jeff Chan discovered it in some J-Town San Francisco bookstore in 1970. The book had been published in 1957 and gone practically unnoticed. We “discovered” it, then, and were passing it on.

Tonight, it would reach my hand, my life, and the story would continue. So we were talking about the book, in the long Oregon dusk, over a bucket of steamed clams Frank Chin and David Ishii brought down from Seattle. With the book. This was before Frank would take “The Chickencoop Chinaman” to New York to be the first Asian-American drama produced by the “legitimate” theater. This was before David would open his landmark Seattle bookstore. This was before I drove up to Seattle with my wife and children just to see the book in context.

The book, you see, had something to do with all of that.

Somehow, after each ensuing one of us would read it—those of us who eventually formed the Combined Asian-American Resources Project, CARP, committed to the living tradition of Asian-American thought and action—the unspoken commitment would grow between us: we were going to do something about the book.

We knew, we felt, we owed it to us, to John: the world had been deprived too long. A book this true and strong was our very substance. So we got as many copies as we could and spread the word, bringing the book to campuses and communities. Jeff, Frank, Shawn Wong, and myself, we featured an excerpt from the book in our collection of Asian-American writing,

Aiiieeee!, and dedicated it to John, along with Louis Chu, a story in himself. Many more stories, I'm sure, will happen.

I could tell about how we tried to locate John, his family; I could tell about letters to his publisher, Charles Tuttle; I could tell about the hows and whys of the book's almost total lack of reception. Suffice to say that, after we "found" it, the book gained an immediate and receptive audience and went quickly out of print.

But that was before this part of the story. Frank and I left San Francisco on a late spring afternoon heading for L.A. We stopped off for a moment at my parents' home in Fresno before dinner at Richard Wing's Imperial Dynasty in the storied China Alley of Hanford. Phillip Ahn, the actor, was there, and we said hello. Richard greeted us as though we were on a mission, which we were: we were going to meet Dorothy Okada.

A lot of important stories happened in the next few days. We taped an interview with George Takei, later to be the incredible lead in Frank's "The Year Of The Dragon," the first Asian-American play on national television. We spoke to Franklin Odo's Asian-American Studies class at UCLA, with Gordon Hirabayashi, who made his story in Seattle for courageous opposition to "evacuation." Then we all had dinner at Harry Kitano's, where Harry told a great story about "passing" for Chinese so he could get out of the Camps to play dixieland trombone. More stories, more warmth, more feelings, sharing our collective experience.

Later on we gave a benefit reading for Amerasia Bookstore at the Senshin Buddhist Church. Frank read from "The Chicken Coop Chinaman," Warren Furutani sang strong songs, and I read "Asian Brother, Asian Sister" with Dan and June Kuramoto on flute and koto. Altogether a beautiful evening.

Then it turned out that our car had been broken into

We lost some tapes, the recorder, found Frank's briefcase in an alley, but by then it really didn't matter that much because we knew there was much more material to be gotten, and we had *met* Dorothy Okada.

Dorothy is a truly wonderful person. It hurt to have her tell us that "John would have liked you." It hurt to have her tell us that "you two are the first ones who ever came to see him about his work." It hurt to have her tell us that she recently burned his "other novel, about the Issei, which we both researched, and which was almost finished." It hurt to have her tell us that "the people I tried to contact about it never answered, so when I moved I burned it, because *I have him in my heart.*" It hurt to have her tell us that all she had to show of his "other work" were a few technical brochures for business corporations, which is how he made his living. It hurt to have her tell us that "you really didn't miss meeting him by very long."

You could say that John was "ahead of his time," that he was born too early and died too young. That was back in the days when a man like him was an "Oriental," and you worked hard for your family, for what you believed in. That was back in the days of "humble beginnings," before "ethnic" literature, before "ethnic" programs on campuses, before "Asian-America," even. That was back in the days when a Jap was just a Jap.

You could say all that about John and be wrong. That doesn't fit his measure. You don't measure a man like that, not in those terms, not with all his power and stature. John Okada was a magnificent man, a huge man who lived a full life of love and action. Most certainly he had difficulties—he *was*, after all, a Jap in America, who lived through America, through the War—but what he brought through the beauty of his soul is a tribute to us all. John Okada was a man with a

vision, and he saw it through.

So John was really there with us, all along. You could feel him in the presence of Dorothy, so very proud and warm. You could feel him in the way she spoke of their children—a daughter and son in college, both devoted to music. You can feel him as you read this book, the very heart of the man, throbbing, within you, making you stand up and move to others, filled with the passion and compassion of being.

Such is the man John was, and is. And of all his family we have been proud to meet, of all his friends, the one thing that stands out when they speak of him is love. Love, and the pride that goes with it—for him, and from him. Love. This is what you will feel, too, beneath the unanimity of brilliance: love. This is the gift and measure of the man: a legacy of love. This is what sustains us, gives us hope and vision, ennobles our lives.

And as proud as we are to make this book available again, as our fittingly initial publication, the privilege is really ours: take it, and give it, from John.

Whoever reads this book will be a bigger person for it. Whoever reads this book will never be the same. Whoever reads this book will see, and be, with greater strength and clarity. And in this way does the world begin to change.

For as with Carlos Bulosan's *America Is In The Heart*, as with Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, and as with Toshio Mori's *Yokohama, California*, John Okada's *No-No Boy* is much more than a great and lasting work of art. It is a living force among us. And it is just one of the many beautiful and courageous stories of the continuing story of what we know as Asian-America.

Lawson Fusao Inada
La Grande, Oregon, July 29, 1976

Preface

DECEMBER THE SEVENTH of the year 1941 was the day when the Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor.

As of that moment, the Japanese in the United States became, by virtue of their ineradicable brownness and the slant eyes which, upon close inspection, will seldom appear slanty, animals of a different breed. The moment the impact of the words solemnly being transmitted over the several million radios of the nation struck home, everything Japanese and everyone Japanese became despicable.

The college professor, finding it suddenly impossible to meet squarely the gaze of his polite, serious, but now too Japanese-ish star pupil, coughed on his pipe and assured the lad that things were a mess. Conviction lacking, he failed at his attempt to be worldly and assuring. He mumbled something about things turning out one way or the other sooner or later and sighed with relief when the little fellow, who hardly ever smiled and, now, probably never would, stood up and left the room.

In a tavern, a drunk, irrigating the sponge in his belly, let it be known to the world that he never thought much about the sneaky Japs and that this proved he was right. It did not matter that he owed his Japanese landlord three-weeks' rent, nor that that industrious Japanese had often picked him off the sidewalk and deposited him on his bed. Someone set up a round of beer for the boys in the place and, further fortified, he announced with patriotic tremor in his alcoholic tones that he would be first in line at the recruiting office the very next morning. That night the Japanese landlord plucked him off the sidewalk and put him to bed.

Jackie was a whore and the news made her unhappy because she got two bucks a head and the Japanese boys were clean and considerate and hot and fast. Aside from her professional interest in them, she really liked them. She was sorry and, in her sorrow, she suffered a little with them.

A truck and a keen sense of horse-trading had provided a good living for Herman Fine. He bought from and sold primarily to Japanese hotel-keepers and grocers. No transaction was made without considerable haggling and clever maneuvering, for the Japanese could be and often were a shifty lot whose solemn promises frequently turned out to be groundwork for more extended and complex stratagems to cheat him out of his rightful profit. Herman Fine listened to the radio and cried without tears for the Japanese, who, in an instant of time that was not even a speck on the big calendar, had taken their place beside the Jew. The Jew was used to suffering. The writing for them was etched in caked and dried blood over countless generations upon countless generations. The Japanese did not know. They were proud, too proud, and they were ambitious, too ambitious. Bombs had fallen and, in less time than it takes a Japanese farmer's wife in California to run from the fields into the house and give birth to a child, the writing was scrawled for them. The Jap-Jew would look in the mirror this Sunday night and see a Jap-Jew.

The indignation, the hatred, the patriotism of the American people shifted into full-throated condemnation of the Japanese who blotted their land. The Japanese who were born Americans and remained Japanese because biology does not know the meaning of patriotism no longer worried about whether they were Japanese-Americans or American-Japanese. They were Japanese, just as were their Japanese mothers

and Japanese fathers and Japanese brothers and sisters. The radio had said as much.

First, the real Japanese-Japanese were rounded up. These real Japanese-Japanese were Japanese nationals who had the misfortune to be diplomats and businessmen and visiting professors. They were put on a boat and sent back to Japan.

Then the alien Japanese, the ones who had been in America for two, three, or even four decades, were screened, and those found to be too actively Japanese were transported to the hinterlands and put in a camp.

The security screen was sifted once more and, this time, the lesser lights were similarly plucked and deposited. An old man, too old, too feeble, and too scared, was caught in the net. In his pocket was a little, black book. He had been a collector for the Japan-Help-the-Poor-and-Starving-and-Flooded-Out-and-Homeless-and-Crippled-and-What-Have-You Fund. "Yamada-san, 50 American cents; Okada-san, two American dollars; Watanabe-san, 24 American cents; Takizaki-san, skip this month because boy broke leg"; and so on down the page. Yamada-san, Okada-san, Watanabe-san, Takizaki-san, and so on down the page were whisked away from their homes while weeping families wept until the tears must surely have been wept dry, and then wept some more.

By now, the snowball was big enough to wipe out the rising sun. The big rising sun would take a little more time, but the little rising sun which was the Japanese in countless Japanese communities in the coastal states of Washington, Oregon, and California presented no problem. The whisking and transporting of Japanese and the construction of camps with barbed wire and ominous towers supporting fully armed soldiers in places like Idaho and Wyoming and Arizona, places which even Hollywood scorned for background, had become skills

which demanded the utmost of America's great organizing ability.

And so, a few months after the seventh day of December of the year nineteen forty-one, the only Japanese left on the west coast of the United States was Matsusaburo Inabukuro who, while it has been forgotten whether he was Japanese-American or American-Japanese, picked up an "I am Chinese" — not American or American-Chinese or Chinese-American but "I am Chinese" — button and got a job in a California shipyard.

Two years later a good Japanese-American who had volunteered for the army sat smoking in the belly of a B-24 on his way back to Guam from a reconnaissance flight to Japan. His job was to listen through his ear-phones, which were attached to a high-frequency set, and jot down air-ground messages spoken by Japanese-Japanese in Japanese planes and in Japanese radio shacks.

The lieutenant who operated the radar-detection equipment was a blond giant from Nebraska.

The lieutenant from Nebraska said: "Where you from?"

The Japanese-American who was an American soldier answered: "No place in particular."

"You got folks?"

"Yeah, I got folks."

"Where at?"

"Wyoming, out in the desert."

"Farmers, huh?"

"Not quite."

"What's that mean?"

"Well, it's this way" And then the Japanese-American whose folks were still Japanese-Japanese, or else they would not be in a camp with barbed wire and watchtowers with soldiers holding rifles, told the blond giant from Nebraska about the removal of the Japanese

from the Coast, which was called the evacuation, and about the concentration camps, which were called relocation centers.

The lieutenant listened and he didn't believe it. He said: "That's funny. Now, tell me again."

The Japanese-American soldier of the American army told it again and didn't change a word.

The lieutenant believed him this time. "Hell's bells," he exclaimed, "if they'd done that to me, I wouldn't be sitting in the belly of a broken-down B-24 going back to Guam from a reconnaissance mission to Japan."

"I got reasons," said the Japanese-American soldier soberly.

"They could kiss my ass," said the lieutenant from Nebraska.

"I got reasons," said the Japanese-American soldier soberly, and he was thinking about a lot of things but mostly about his friend who didn't volunteer for the army because his father had been picked up in the second screening and was in a different camp from the one he and his mother and two sisters were in. Later on, the army tried to draft his friend out of the relocation camp into the army and the friend had stood before the judge and said let my father out of that other camp and come back to my mother who is an old woman but misses him enough to want to sleep with him and I'll try on the uniform. The judge said he couldn't do that and the friend said he wouldn't be drafted and they sent him to the federal prison where he now was.

"What the hell are we fighting for?" said the lieutenant from Nebraska.

"I got reasons," said the Japanese-American soldier soberly and thought some more about his friend who was in another kind of uniform because they wouldn't let his father go to the same camp with his mother and sisters.

TWO WEEKS AFTER his twenty-fifth birthday, Ichiro got off a bus at Second and Main in Seattle. He had been gone four years, two in camp and two in prison.

Walking down the street that autumn morning with a small, black suitcase, he felt like an intruder in a world to which he had no claim. It was just enough that he should feel this way, for, of his own free will, he had stood before the judge and said that he would not go in the army. At the time there was no other choice for him. That was when he was twenty-three, a man of twenty-three. Now, two years older, he was even more of a man.

Christ, he thought to himself, just a goddamn kid is all I was. Didn't know enough to wipe my own nose. What the hell have I done? What am I doing back here? Best thing I can do would be to kill some son of a bitch and head back to prison.

He walked toward the railroad depot where the tower with the clocks on all four sides was. It was a dirty looking tower of ancient brick. It was a dirty city. Dirtier, certainly, than it had a right to be after only four years.

Waiting for the light to change to green, he looked around at the people standing at the bus stop. A couple of men in suits, half a dozen women who failed to arouse him even after prolonged good behavior, and a young Japanese with a lunch bucket. Ichiro studied him, searching in his mind for the name that went with

the round, pimply face and the short-cropped hair. The pimples were gone and the face had hardened, but the hair was still cropped. The fellow wore green, army-fatigue trousers and an Eisenhower jacket—Eto Minato. The name came to him at the same time as did the horrible significance of the army clothes. In panic, he started to step off the curb. It was too late. He had been seen.

“Itchy!” That was his nickname.

Trying to escape, Ichiro urged his legs frenziedly across the street.

“Hey, Itchy!” The caller’s footsteps ran toward him.

An arm was placed across his back. Ichiro stopped and faced the other Japanese. He tried to smile, but could not. There was no way out now.

“I’m Eto. Remember?” Eto smiled and extended his palm. Reluctantly, Ichiro lifted his own hand and let the other shake it.

The round face with the round eyes peered at him through silver-rimmed spectacles. “What the hell! It’s been a long time, but not that long. How’ve you been? What’s doing?”

“Well . . . that is, I’m . . .”

“Last time must have been before Pearl Harbor. God, it’s been quite a while, hasn’t it? Three, no, closer to four years, I guess. Lotsa Japs coming back to the Coast. Lotsa Japs in Seattle. You’ll see ’em around. Japs are funny that way. Gotta have their rice and saké and other Japs. Stupid, I say. The smart ones went to Chicago and New York and lotsa places back east, but there’s still plenty coming back out this way.” Eto drew cigarettes from his breast pocket and held out the package. “No? Well, I’ll have one. Got the habit in the army. Just got out a short while back. Rough time, but I made it. Didn’t get out in time to make the quarter, but I’m planning to go to school. How long you been

around?”

Ichiro touched his toe to the suitcase. “Just got in. Haven’t been home yet.”

“When’d you get discharged?”

A car grinding its gears started down the street. He wished he were in it. “I . . . that is . . . I never was in.”

Eto slapped him good-naturedly on the arm. “No need to look so sour. So you weren’t in. So what? Been in camp all this time?”

“No.” He made an effort to be free of Eto with his questions. He felt as if he were in a small room whose walls were slowly closing in on him. “It’s been a long time, I know, but I’m really anxious to see the folks.”

“What the hell. Let’s have a drink. On me. I don’t give a damn if I’m late to work. As for your folks, you’ll see them soon enough. You drink, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but not now.”

“Ahh.” Eto was disappointed. He shifted his lunch box from under one arm to the other.

“I’ve really got to be going.”

The round face wasn’t smiling any more. It was thoughtful. The eyes confronted Ichiro with indecision which changed slowly to enlightenment and then to suspicion. He remembered. He knew.

The friendliness was gone as he said: “No-no boy, huh?”

Ichiro wanted to say yes. He wanted to return the look of despising hatred and say simply yes, but it was too much to say. The walls had closed in and were crushing all the unspoken words back down into his stomach. He shook his head once, not wanting to evade the eyes but finding it impossible to meet them. Out of his big weakness the little ones were branching, and the eyes he didn’t have the courage to face were ever present. If it would have helped to gouge out his own eyes, he would have done so long ago. The hate-churned

eyes with the stamp of unrelenting condemnation were his cross and he had driven the nails with his own hands.

"Rotten bastard. Shit on you." Eto coughed up a mouthful of sputum and rolled his words around it: "Rotten, no-good bastard."

Surprisingly, Ichiro felt relieved. Eto's anger seemed to serve as a release to his own naked tensions. As he stooped to lift the suitcase a wet wad splattered over his hand and dripped onto the black leather. The legs of his accuser were in front of him. God in a pair of green fatigues, U.S. Army style. They were the legs of the jury that had passed sentence upon him. Beseech me, they seemed to say, throw your arms about me and bury your head between my knees and seek pardon for your great sin.

"I'll piss on you next time," said Eto vehemently.

He turned as he lifted the suitcase off the ground and hurried away from the legs and the eyes from which no escape was possible.

Jackson Street started at the waterfront and stretched past the two train depots and up the hill all the way to the lake, where the houses were bigger and cleaner and had garages with late-model cars in them. For Ichiro, Jackson Street signified that section of the city immediately beyond the railroad tracks between Fifth and Twelfth Avenues. That was the section which used to be pretty much Japanese town. It was adjacent to Chinatown and most of the gambling and prostitution and drinking seemed to favor the area.

Like the dirty clock tower of the depot, the filth of Jackson Street had increased. Ichiro paused momentarily at an alley and peered down the passage formed by the walls of two sagging buildings. There had been a door there at one time, a back door to a movie house which only charged a nickel. A nickel was a lot of money

when he had been seven or nine or eleven. He wanted to go into the alley to see if the door was still there.

Being on Jackson Street with its familiar store fronts and taverns and restaurants, which were somehow different because the war had left its mark on them, was like trying to find one's way out of a dream that seemed real most of the time but wasn't really real because it was still only a dream. The war had wrought violent changes upon the people, and the people, in turn, working hard and living hard and earning a lot of money and spending it on whatever was available, had distorted the profile of Jackson Street. The street had about it the air of a carnival without quite succeeding at becoming one. A shooting gallery stood where once had been a clothing store; fish and chips had replaced a jewelry shop; and a bunch of Negroes were horsing around raucously in front of a pool parlor. Everything looked older and dirtier and shabbier.

He walked past the pool parlor, picking his way gingerly among the Negroes, of whom there had been only a few at one time and of whom there seemed to be nothing but now. They were smoking and shouting and cussing and carousing and the sidewalk was slimy with their spittle.

"Jap!"

His pace quickened automatically, but curiosity or fear or indignation or whatever it was made him glance back at the white teeth framed in a leering dark brown which was almost black.

"Go back to Tokyo, boy." Persecution in the drawl of the persecuted.

The white teeth and brown-black leers picked up the cue and jiggled to the rhythmical chanting of "Jap-boy, To-ki-yo; Jap-boy, To-ki-yo . . ."

Friggin' niggers, he uttered savagely to himself and, from the same place deep down inside where tolerance

for the Negroes and the Jews and the Mexicans and the Chinese and the too short and too fat and too ugly abided because he was Japanese and knew what it was like better than did those who were white and average and middle class and good Democrats or liberal Republicans, the hate which was unrelenting and terrifying seethed up.

Then he was home. It was a hole in the wall with groceries crammed in orderly confusion on not enough shelving, into not enough space. He knew what it would be like even before he stepped in. His father had described the place to him in a letter, composed in simple Japanese characters because otherwise Ichiro could not have read it. The letter had been purposely repetitive and painstakingly detailed so that Ichiro should not have any difficulty finding the place. The grocery store was the same one the Ozakis had operated for many years. That's all his father had had to say. Come to the grocery store which was once the store of the Ozakis. The Japanese characters, written simply so that he could read them, covered pages of directions as if he were a foreigner coming to the city for the first time.

Thinking about the letter made him so mad that he forgot about the Negroes. He opened the door just as he had a thousand times when they had lived farther down the block and he used to go to the Ozakis' for a loaf of bread or a jar of pickled scallions, and the bell tinkled just as he knew it would. All the grocery stores he ever knew had bells which tinkled when one opened the door and the familiar sound softened his inner turmoil.

"Ichiro?" The short, round man who came through the curtains at the back of the store uttered the name preciously as might an old woman. "Ya, Ichiro, you have come home. How good that you have come home!" The gently spoken Japanese which he had not

heard for so long sounded strange. He would hear a great deal of it now that he was home, for his parents, like most of the old Japanese, spoke virtually no English. On the other hand, the children, like Ichiro, spoke almost no Japanese. Thus they communicated, the old speaking Japanese with an occasional badly mispronounced word or two of English; and the young, with the exception of a simple word or phrase of Japanese which came fairly effortlessly to the lips, resorting almost constantly to the tongue the parents avoided.

The father bounced silently over the wood flooring in slippered feet toward his son. Fondly, delicately, he placed a pudgy hand on Ichiro's elbow and looked up at his son who was Japanese but who had been big enough for football and tall enough for basketball in high school. He pushed the elbow and Ichiro led the way into the back, where there was a kitchen, a bathroom, and one bedroom. He looked around the bedroom and felt like puking. It was neat and clean and scrubbed. His mother would have seen to that. It was just the idea of everybody sleeping in the one room. He wondered if his folks still pounded flesh.

He backed out of the bedroom and slumped down on a stool. "Where's Ma?"

"Mama is gone to the bakery." The father kept his beaming eyes on his son who was big and tall. He shut off the flow of water and shifted the metal teapot to the stove.

"What for?"

"Bread," his father said in reply, "bread for the store."

"Don't they deliver?"

"Ya, they deliver." He ran a damp rag over the table, which was spotlessly clean.

"What the hell is she doing at the bakery then?"

"It is good business, Ichiro." He was at the cupboard, fussing with the tea cups and saucers and cookies. "The truck comes in the morning. We take enough for the morning business. For the afternoon, we get soft, fresh bread. Mama goes to the bakery."

Ichiro tried to think of a bakery nearby and couldn't. There was a big Wonder Bread bakery way up on Nineteenth, where a nickel used to buy a bagful of day-old stuff. That was thirteen and a half blocks, all uphill. He knew the distance by heart because he'd walked it twice every day to go to grade school, which was a half-block beyond the bakery or fourteen blocks from home.

"What bakery?"

The water on the stove began to boil and the old man flipped the lid on the pot and tossed in a pinch of leaves. "Wonder Bread."

"Is that the one up on Nineteenth?"

"Ya."

"How much do you make on bread?"

"Let's see," he said pouring the tea, "Oh, three, four cents. Depends."

"How many loaves does Ma get?"

"Ten or twelve. Depends."

Ten loaves at three or four cents' profit added up to thirty or forty cents. He compromised at thirty-five cents and asked the next question: "The bus, how much is it?"

"Oh, let's see." He sipped the tea noisily, sucking it through his teeth in well regulated gulps. "Let's see. Fifteen cents for one time. Tokens are two for twenty-five cents. That is twelve and one-half cents."

Twenty-five cents for bus fare to get ten loaves of bread which turned a profit of thirty-five cents. It would take easily an hour to make the trip up and back. He didn't mean to shout, but he shouted: "Christ, Pa, what else do you give away?"

His father peered over the teacup with a look of innocent surprise.

It made him madder. "Figure it out. Just figure it out. Say you make thirty-five cents on ten loaves. You take a bus up and back and there's twenty-five cents shot. That leaves ten cents. On top of that, there's an hour wasted. What are you running a business for? Your health?"

Slup went the tea through his teeth, slup, slup, slup. "Mama walks." He sat there looking at his son like a benevolent Buddha.

Ichiro lifted the cup to his lips and let the liquid burn down his throat. His father had said "Mama walks" and that made things right with the world. The overwhelming simplicity of the explanation threatened to evoke silly giggles which, if permitted to escape, might lead to hysterics. He clenched his fists and subdued them.

At the opposite end of the table the father had slugged the last of his tea and was already taking the few steps to the sink to rinse out the cup.

"Goddammit, Pa, sit down!" He'd never realized how nervous a man his father was. The old man had constantly been doing something every minute since he had come. It didn't figure. Here he was, round and fat and cheerful-looking and, yet, he was going incessantly as though his trousers were crawling with ants.

"Ya, Ichiro, I forget you have just come home. We should talk." He resumed his seat at the table and busied his fingers with a box of matches.

Ichiro stepped out of the kitchen, spotted the cigarettes behind the cash register, and returned with a pack of Camels. Lighting a match, the old man held it between his fingers and waited until the son opened the package and put a cigarette in his mouth. By then the match was threatening to sear his fingers. He dropped

it hastily and stole a sheepish glance at Ichiro, who reached for the box and struck his own match.

"Ichiro." There was a timorousness in the father's voice. Or was it apology?

"Yeah."

"Was it very hard?"

"No. It was fun." The sarcasm didn't take.

"You are sorry?" He was waddling over rocky ground on a pitch-black night and he didn't like it one bit.

"I'm okay, Pa. It's finished. Done and finished. No use talking about it."

"True," said the old man too heartily. "it is done and there is no use to talk." The bell tinkled and he leaped from the chair and fled out of the kitchen.

Using the butt of the first cigarette, Ichiro lit another. He heard his father's voice in the store.

"Mama. Ichiro. Ichiro is here."

The sharp, lifeless tone of his mother's words flipped through the silence and he knew that she hadn't changed.

"The bread must be put out."

In other homes mothers and fathers and sons and daughters rushed into hungry arms after week-end separations to find assurance in crushing embraces and loving kisses. The last time he saw his mother was over two years ago. He waited, seeing in the sounds of the rustling waxed paper the stiff, angular figure of the woman stacking the bread on the rack in neat, precise piles.

His father came back into the kitchen with a little less bounce and began to wash the cups. She came through the curtains a few minutes after, a small, flat-chested, shapeless woman who wore her hair pulled back into a tight bun. Hers was the awkward, skinny body of a thirteen-year-old which had dried and toughened through the many years following but which had devel-

oped no further. He wondered how the two of them had ever gotten together long enough to have two sons.

"I am proud that you are back," she said. "I am proud to call you my son."

It was her way of saying that she had made him what he was and that the thing in him which made him say no to the judge and go to prison for two years was the growth of a seed planted by the mother tree and that she was the mother who had put this thing in her son and that everything that had been done and said was exactly as it should have been and that that was what made him her son because no other would have made her feel the pride that was in her breast.

He looked at his mother and swallowed with difficulty the bitterness that threatened to destroy the last fragment of understanding for the woman who was his mother and still a stranger because, in truth, he could not know what it was to be a Japanese who breathed the air of America and yet had never lifted a foot from the land that was Japan.

"I've been talking with Pa," he said, not knowing or caring why except that he had to say something.

"After a while, you and I, we will talk also." She walked through the kitchen into the bedroom and hung her coat and hat in a wardrobe of cardboard which had come from Sears Roebuck. Then she came back through the kitchen and out into the store.

The father gave him what was meant to be a knowing look and uttered softly: "Doesn't like my not being in the store when she is out. I tell her the bell tinkles, but she does not understand."

"Hell's bells," he said in disgust. Pushing himself out of the chair violently, he strode into the bedroom and flung himself out on one of the double beds.

Lying there, he wished the roof would fall in and bury forever the anguish which permeated his every pore.

He lay there fighting with his burden, lighting one cigarette after another and dropping ashes and butts purposely on the floor. It was the way he felt, stripped of dignity, respect, purpose, honor, all the things which added up to schooling and marriage and family and work and happiness.

It was to please her, he said to himself with teeth clamped together to imprison the wild, meaningless, despairing cry which was forever straining inside of him. Pa's okay, but he's a nobody. He's a goddamned, fat, grinning, spineless nobody. Ma is the rock that's always hammering, pounding, pounding, pounding in her unobtrusive, determined, fanatical way until there's nothing left to call one's self. She's cursed me with her meanness and the hatred that you cannot see but which is always hating. It was she who opened my mouth and made my lips move to sound the words which got me two years in prison and an emptiness that is more empty and frightening than the caverns of hell. She's killed me with her meanness and hatred and I hope she's happy because I'll never know the meaning of it again.

"Ichiro."

He propped himself up on an elbow and looked at her. She had hardly changed. Surely, there must have been a time when she could smile and, yet, he could not remember.

"Yeah?"

"Lunch is on the table."

As he pushed himself off the bed and walked past her to the kitchen, she took broom and dustpan and swept up the mess he had made.

There were eggs, fried with soy sauce, sliced cold meat, boiled cabbage, and tea and rice. They all ate in silence, not even disturbed once by the tinkling of the

bell. The father cleared the table after they had finished and dutifully retired to watch the store. Ichiro had smoked three cigarettes before his mother ended the silence.

"You must go back to school."

He had almost forgotten that there had been a time before the war when he had actually gone to college for two years and studiously applied himself to courses in the engineering school. The statement staggered him. Was that all there was to it? Did she mean to sit there and imply that the four intervening years were to be casually forgotten and life resumed as if there had been no four years and no war and no Eto who had spit on him because of the thing he had done?

"I don't feel much like going to school."

"What will you do?"

"I don't know."

"With an education, your opportunities in Japan will be unlimited. You must go and complete your studies."

"Ma," he said slowly, "Ma, I'm not going to Japan. Nobody's going to Japan. The war is over. Japan lost. Do you hear? Japan lost."

"You believe that?" It was said in the tone of an adult asking a child who is no longer a child if he really believed that Santa Claus was real.

"Yes, I believe it. I know it. America is still here. Do you see the great Japanese army walking down the streets? No. There is no Japanese army any more."

"The boat is coming and we must be ready."

"The boat?"

"Yes." She reached into her pocket and drew out a worn envelope.

The letter had been mailed from Sao Paulo, Brazil, and was addressed to a name that he did not recognize. Inside the envelope was a single sheet of flimsy, rice paper covered with intricate flourishes of Japanese

characters.

"What does it say?"

She did not bother to pick up the letter. "To you who are a loyal and honorable Japanese, it is with humble and heartfelt joy that I relay this momentous message. Word has been brought to us that the victorious Japanese government is presently making preparations to send ships which will return to Japan those residents in foreign countries who have steadfastly maintained their faith and loyalty to our Emperor. The Japanese government regrets that the responsibilities arising from the victory compels them to delay in the sending of the vessels. To be among the few who remain to receive this honor is a gratifying tribute. Heed not the propaganda of the radio and newspapers which endeavor to convince the people with lies about the allied victory. Especially, heed not the lies of your traitorous countrymen who have turned their backs on the country of their birth and who will suffer for their treasonous acts. The day of glory is close at hand. The rewards will be beyond our greatest expectations. What we have done, we have done only as Japanese, but the government is grateful. Hold your heads high and make ready for the journey, for the ships are coming."

"Who wrote that?" he asked incredulously. It was like a weird nightmare. It was like finding out that an incurable strain of insanity pervaded the family, an intangible horror that swayed and taunted beyond the grasp of reaching fingers.

"A friend in South America. We are not alone."

"We are alone," he said vehemently. "This whole thing is crazy. You're crazy. I'm crazy. All right, so we made a mistake. Let's admit it."

"There has been no mistake. The letter confirms."

"Sure it does. It proves there's crazy people in the world besides us. If Japan won the war, what the hell

are we doing here? What are you doing running a grocery store? It doesn't figure. It doesn't figure because we're all wrong. The minute we admit that, everything is fine. I've had a lot of time to think about all this. I've thought about it, and every time the answer comes out the same. You can't tell me different any more."

She sighed ever so slightly. "We will talk later when you are feeling better." Carefully folding the letter and placing it back in the envelope, she returned it to her pocket. "It is not I who tell you that the ship is coming. It is in the letter. If you have come to doubt your mother—and I'm sure you do not mean it even if you speak in weakness—it is to be regretted. Rest a few days. Think more deeply and your doubts will disappear. You are my son, Ichiro."

No, he said to himself as he watched her part the curtains and start into the store. There was a time when I was your son. There was a time that I no longer remember when you used to smile a mother's smile and tell me stories about gallant and fierce warriors who protected their lords with blades of shining steel and about the old woman who found a peach in the stream and took it home and, when her husband split it in half, a husky little boy tumbled out to fill their hearts with boundless joy. I was that boy in the peach and you were the old woman and we were Japanese with Japanese feelings and Japanese pride and Japanese thoughts because it was all right then to be Japanese and feel and think all the things that Japanese do even if we lived in America. Then there came a time when I was only half Japanese because one is not born in America and raised in America and taught in America and one does not speak and swear and drink and smoke and play and fight and see and hear in America among Americans in American streets and houses without becoming

American and loving it. But I did not love enough, for you were still half my mother and I was thereby still half Japanese and when the war came and they told me to fight for America, I was not strong enough to fight you and I was not strong enough to fight the bitterness which made the half of me which was you bigger than the half of me which was America and really the whole of me that I could not see or feel. Now that I know the truth when it is too late and the half of me which was you is no longer there, I am only half of me and the half that remains is American by law because the government was wise and strong enough to know why it was that I could not fight for America and did not strip me of my birthright. But it is not enough to be American only in the eyes of the law and it is not enough to be only half an American and know that it is an empty half. I am not your son and I am not Japanese and I am not American. I can go someplace and tell people that I've got an inverted stomach and that I am an American, true and blue and Hail Columbia, but the army wouldn't have me because of the stomach. That's easy and I would do it, only I've got to convince myself first and that I cannot do. I wish with all my heart that I were Japanese or that I were American. I am neither and I blame you and I blame myself and I blame the world which is made up of many countries which fight with each other and kill and hate and destroy but not enough, so that they must kill and hate and destroy again and again and again. It is so easy and simple that I cannot understand it at all. And the reason I do not understand it is because I do not understand you who were the half of me that is no more and because I do not understand what it was about that half that made me destroy the half of me which was American and the half which might have become the whole of me if I had said yes I will go and fight in your army because that is what I

believe and want and cherish and love . . .

Defeatedly, he crushed the stub of a cigarette into an ash tray filled with many other stubs and reached for the package to get another. It was empty and he did not want to go into the store for more because he did not feel much like seeing either his father or mother. He went into the bedroom and tossed and groaned and half slept.

Hours later, someone shook him awake. It was not his mother and it was not his father. The face that looked down at him in the gloomy darkness was his brother's.

"Taro," he said softly, for he had hardly thought of him.

"Yeah, it's me," said his brother with unmistakable embarrassment. "I see you got out."

"How've you been?" He studied his brother, who was as tall as he but skinnier.

"Okay. It's time to eat." He started to leave.

"Taro, wait."

His brother stood framed in the light of the doorway and faced him.

"How've you been?" he repeated. Then he added quickly for fear of losing him: "No, I said that before and I don't mean it the way it sounds. We've got things to talk about. Long time since we saw each other."

"Yeah, it's been a long time."

"How's school?"

"Okay."

"About through with high school?"

"Next June."

"What then? College?"

"No, army."

He wished he could see his face, the face of the brother who spoke to him as though they were strangers

—because that's what they were.

"You could get in a year or two before the draft," he heard himself saying in an effort to destroy the wall that separated them. "I read where you can take an exam now and get a deferment if your showing is good enough. A fellow's got to have all the education he can get, Taro."

"I don't want a deferment. I want in."

"Ma know?"

"Who cares?"

"She won't like it."

"Doesn't matter."

"Why so strong about the army? Can't you wait? They'll come and get you soon enough."

"That isn't soon enough for me."

"What's your reason?"

He waited for an answer, knowing what it was and not wanting to hear it.

"Is it because of me? What I did?"

"I'm hungry," his brother said and turned into the kitchen.

His mother had already eaten and was watching the store. He sat opposite his brother, who wolfed down the food without looking back at him. It wasn't more than a few minutes before he rose, grabbed his jacket off a nail on the wall, and left the table. The bell tinkled and he was gone.

"Don't mind him," said the father apologetically. "Taro is young and restless. He's never home except to eat and sleep."

"When does he study?"

"He does not."

"Why don't you do something about it?"

"I tell him. Mama tells him. Makes no difference. It is the war that has made them that way. All the people say the same thing. The war and the camp life. Made

them wild like cats and dogs. It is hard to understand."

"Sure," he said, but he told himself that he understood, that the reason why Taro was not a son and not a brother was because he was young and American and alien to his parents, who had lived in America for thirty-five years without becoming less Japanese and could speak only a few broken words of English and write it not at all, and because Taro hated that thing in his elder brother which had prevented him from thinking for himself. And in his hate for that thing, he hated his brother and also his parents because they had created the thing with their eyes and hands and minds which had seen and felt and thought as Japanese for thirty-five years in an America which they rejected as thoroughly as if they had never been a day away from Japan. That was the reason and it was difficult to believe, but it was true because he was the emptiness between the one and the other and could see flashes of the truth that was true for his parents and the truth that was true for his brother.

"Pa," he said.

"Ya, Ichiro." He was swirling a dishcloth in a pan of hot water and working up suds for the dishes.

"What made you and Ma come to America?"

"Everyone was coming to America."

"Did you have to come?"

"No. We came to make money."

"Is that all?"

"Ya, I think that was why we came."

"Why to make money?"

"There was a man in my village who went to America and made a lot of money and he came back and bought a big piece of land and he was very comfortable. We came so we could make money and go back and buy a piece of land and be comfortable too."

"Did you ever think about staying here and not going

back?"

"No."

He looked at his father, who was old and bald and washing dishes in a kitchen that was behind a hole in the wall that was a grocery store. "How do you feel about it now?"

"About what?"

"Going back."

"We are going."

"When?"

"Oh, pretty soon."

"How soon?"

"Pretty soon."

There didn't seem to be much point in pursuing the questioning. He went out to the store and got a fresh pack of cigarettes. His mother was washing down the vegetable stand, which stood alongside the entrance. Her thin arms swabbed the green-painted wood with sweeping, vigorous strokes. There was a power in the wiry, brown arms, a hard, blind, unreckoning force which coursed through veins of tough bamboo. When she had done her work, she carried the pail of water to the curb outside and poured it on the street. Then she came back through the store and into the living quarters and emerged once more dressed in her coat and hat.

"Come, Ichiro," she said, "we must go and see Kumasaka-san and Ashida-san. They will wish to know that you are back."

The import of the suggested visits made him waver helplessly. He was too stunned to voice his protest. The Kumasakas and the Ashidas were people from the same village in Japan. The three families had been very close for as long as he could recall. Further, it was customary among the Japanese to pay ceremonious visits upon various occasions to families of close association. This was particularly true when a member of

one of the families either departed on an extended absence or returned from an unusually long separation. Yes, he had been gone a long time, but it was such a different thing. It wasn't as if he had gone to war and returned safe and sound or had been matriculating at some school in another city and come home with a sheepskin *summa cum laude*. He scrabbled at the confusion in his mind for the logic of the crazy business and found no satisfaction.

"Papa," his mother shouted without actually shouting.

His father hastened out from the kitchen and Ichiro stumbled in blind fury after the woman who was only a rock of hate and fanatic stubbornness and was, therefore, neither woman nor mother.

They walked through the night and the city, a mother and son thrown together for a while longer because the family group is a stubborn one and does not easily disintegrate. The woman walked ahead and the son followed and no word passed between them. They walked six blocks, then six more, and still another six before they turned into a three-story frame building.

The Ashidas, parents and three daughters, occupied four rooms on the second floor.

"Mama," screamed the ten-year-old who answered the knock, "Mrs. Yamada."

A fat, cheerful-looking woman rushed toward them, then stopped, flushed and surprised. "Ichiro-san. You have come back."

He nodded his head and heard his mother say, with unmistakable exultation: "Today, Ashida-san. Just today he came home."

Urged by their hostess, they took seats in the sparsely furnished living room. Mrs. Ashida sat opposite them on a straight-backed kitchen chair and beamed.

"You have grown so much. It is good to be home, is it

not, Ichiro-san?" She turned to the ten-year-old who gawked at him from behind her mother: "Tell Reiko to get tea and cookies."

"She's studying, Mama."

"You mustn't bother," said his mother.

"Go, now. I know she is only listening to the radio." The little girl fled out of the room.

"It is good to see you again, Ichiro-san. You will find many of your young friends already here. All the people who said they would never come back to Seattle are coming back. It is almost like it was before the war. Akira-san—you went to school with him I think—he is just back from Italy, and Watanabe-san's boy came back from Japan last month. It is so good that the war is over and everything is getting to be like it was before."

"You saw the pictures?" his mother asked.

"What pictures?"

"You have not been to the Watanabes'?"

"Oh, yes, the pictures of Japan." She snickered. "He is such a serious boy. He showed me all the pictures he had taken in Japan. He had many of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I told him that he must be mistaken because Japan did not lose the war as he seems to believe and that he could not have been in Japan to take pictures because, if he were in Japan, he would not have been permitted to remain alive. He protested and yelled so that his mother had to tell him to be careful and then he tried to argue some more, but I asked him if he was ever in Japan before and could he prove that he was actually there and he said again to look at the pictures and I told him that what must really have happened was that the army only told him he was in Japan when he was someplace else, and that it was too bad he believed the propaganda. Then he got so mad his face went white and he said: 'How do you know you're you? Tell me how you know you're you!' If his

mother had not made him leave the room, he might even have struck me. It is not enough that they must willingly take up arms against their uncles and cousins and even brothers and sisters, but they no longer have respect for the old ones. If I had a son and he had gone in the American army to fight Japan, I would have killed myself with shame."

"They know not what they do and it is not their fault. It is the fault of the parents. I've always said that Mr. Watanabe was a stupid man. Gambling and drinking the way he does, I am almost ashamed to call them friends." Ichiro's mother looked at him with a look which said I am a Japanese and you are my son and have conducted yourself as a Japanese and I know no shame such as other parents do because their sons were not really their sons or they would not have fought against their own people.

He wanted to get up and dash out into the night. The madness of his mother was in mutual company and he felt nothing but loathing for the gentle, kindly-looking Mrs. Ashida, who sat on a fifty-cent chair from Goodwill Industries while her husband worked the night shift at a hotel, grinning and bowing for dimes and quarters from rich Americans whom he detested, and couldn't afford to take his family on a bus ride to Tacoma but was waiting and praying and hoping for the ships from Japan.

Reiko brought in a tray holding little teacups and a bowl of thin, round cookies. She was around seventeen with little bumps on her chest which the sweater didn't improve and her lips heavily lipsticked a deep red. She said "Hi" to him and did not have to say look at me, I was a kid when you saw me last but now I'm a woman with a woman's desires and a woman's eye for men like you. She set the tray on the table and gave him a smile before she left.

His mother took the envelope from Sao Paulo out of her dress pocket and handed it to Mrs. Ashida.

"From South America."

The other woman snatched at the envelope and proceeded to read the contents instantly. Her face glowed with pride. She read it eagerly, her lips moving all the time and frequently murmuring audibly. "Such wonderful news," she sighed breathlessly as if the reading of the letter had been a deep emotional experience. "Mrs. Okamoto will be eager to see this. Her husband, who goes out of the house whenever I am there, is threatening to leave her unless she gives up her nonsense about Japan. Nonsense, he calls it. He is no better than a Chinaman. This will show him. I feel so sorry for her."

"It is hard when so many no longer believe," replied his mother, "but they are not Japanese like us. They only call themselves such. It is the same with the Teradas. I no longer go to see them. The last time I was there Mr. Terada screamed at me and told me to get out. They just don't understand that Japan did not lose the war because Japan could not possibly lose. I try not to hate them but I have no course but to point them out to the authorities when the ships come."

"It's getting late, Ma." He stood up, sick in the stomach and wanting desperately to smash his way out of the dishonest, warped, and uncompromising world in which defeated people like his mother and the Ashidas walked their perilous tightropes and could not and would not look about them for having to keep their eyes fastened to the taut, thin support.

"Yes," his mother replied quickly, "forgive us for rushing, for you know that I enjoy nothing better than a visit with you, but we must drop in for a while on the Kumasakas."

"Of course. I wish you could stay longer, but I know

that there will be plenty of opportunities again. You will come again, please, Ichiro-san?"

Mumbling thanks for the tea, he nodded evasively and hurried down the stairs. Outside, he lit a cigarette and paced restlessly until his mother came out.

"A fine woman," she said without stopping.

He followed, talking to the back of her head: "Ma, I don't want to see the Kumasakas tonight. I don't want to see anybody tonight. We'll go some other time."

"We won't stay long."

They walked a few blocks to a freshly painted frame house that was situated behind a neatly kept lawn.

"Nice house," he said.

"They bought it last month."

"Bought it?"

"Yes."

The Kumasakas had run a dry-cleaning shop before the war. Business was good and people spoke of their having money, but they lived in cramped quarters above the shop because, like most of the other Japanese, they planned some day to return to Japan and still felt like transients even after thirty or forty years in America and the quarters above the shop seemed adequate and sensible since the arrangement was merely temporary. That, he thought to himself, was the reason why the Japanese were still Japanese. They rushed to America with the single purpose of making a fortune which would enable them to return to their own country and live adequately. It did not matter when they discovered that fortunes were not for the mere seeking or that their sojourns were spanning decades instead of years and it did not matter that growing families and growing bills and misfortunes and illness and low wages and just plain hard luck were constant obstacles to the realization of their dreams. They continued to maintain their dreams by refusing to learn how to speak

or write the language of America and by living only among their own kind and by zealously avoiding long-term commitments such as the purchase of a house. But now, the Kumasakas, it seemed, had bought this house, and he was impressed. It could only mean that the Kumasakas had exchanged hope for reality and, late as it was, were finally sinking roots into the land from which they had previously sought not nourishment but only gold.

Mrs. Kumasaka came to the door, a short, heavy woman who stood solidly on feet planted wide apart, like a man. She greeted them warmly but with a sadness that she would carry to the grave. When Ichiro had last seen her, her hair had been pitch black. Now it was completely white.

In the living room Mr. Kumasaka, a small man with a pleasant smile, was sunk deep in an upholstered chair, reading a Japanese newspaper. It was a comfortable room with rugs and soft furniture and lamps and end tables and pictures on recently papered walls.

"Ah, Ichiro, it is nice to see you looking well." Mr. Kumasaka struggled out of the chair and extended a friendly hand. "Please, sit down."

"You've got a nice place," he said, meaning it.

"Thank you," the little man said. "Mama and I, we finally decided that America is not so bad. We like it here."

Ichiro sat down on the sofa next to his mother and felt strange in this home which he envied because it was like millions of other homes in America and could never be his own.

Mrs. Kumasaka sat next to her husband on a large, round hassock and looked at Ichiro with lonely eyes which made him uncomfortable.

"Ichiro came home this morning." It was his mother, and the sound of her voice, deliberately loud and almost

arrogant, puzzled him. "He has suffered, but I make no apologies for him or for myself. If he had given his life for Japan, I could not be prouder."

"Ma," he said, wanting to object but not knowing why except that her comments seemed out of place.

Ignoring him, she continued, not looking at the man but at his wife, who now sat with head bowed, her eyes emptily regarding the floral pattern of the carpet. "A mother's lot is not an easy one. To sleep with a man and bear a son is nothing. To raise the child into a man one can be proud of is not play. Some of us succeed. Some, of course, must fail. It is too bad, but that is the way of life."

"Yes, yes, Yamada-san," said the man impatiently. Then, smiling, he turned to Ichiro: "I suppose you'll be going back to the university?"

"I'll have to think about it," he replied, wishing that his father was like this man who made him want to pour out the turbulence in his soul.

"He will go when the new term begins. I have impressed upon him the importance of a good education. With a college education, one can go far in Japan." His mother smiled knowingly.

"Ah," said the man as if he had not heard her speak, "Bobbie wanted to go to the university and study medicine. He would have made a fine doctor. Always studying and reading, is that not so, Ichiro?"

He nodded, remembering the quiet son of the Kumasakas, who never played football with the rest of the kids on the street or appeared at dances, but could talk for hours on end about chemistry and zoology and physics and other courses which he hungered after in high school.

"Sure, Bob always was pretty studious." He knew, somehow, that it was not the right thing to say, but he added: "Where is Bob?"

His mother did not move. Mrs. Kumasaka uttered a despairing cry and bit her trembling lips.

The little man, his face a drawn mask of pity and sorrow, stammered: "Ichiro, you—no one has told you?"

"No. What? No one's told me anything."

"Your mother did not write you?"

"No. Write about what?" He knew what the answer was. It was in the whiteness of the hair of the sad woman who was the mother of the boy named Bob and it was in the engaging pleasantness of the father which was not really pleasantness but a deep understanding which had emerged from resignation to a loss which only a parent knows and suffers. And then he saw the picture on the mantel, a snapshot, enlarged many times over, of a grinning youth in uniform who had not thought to remember his parents with a formal portrait because he was not going to die and there would be worlds of time for pictures and books and other obligations of the living later on.

Mr. Kumasaka startled him by shouting toward the rear of the house: "Jun! Please come."

There was the sound of a door opening and presently there appeared a youth in khaki shirt and wool trousers, who was a stranger to Ichiro.

"I hope I haven't disturbed anything, Jun," said Mr. Kumasaka.

"No, it's all right. Just writing a letter."

"This is Mrs. Yamada and her son Ichiro. They are old family friends."

Jun nodded to his mother and reached over to shake Ichiro's hand.

The little man waited until Jun had seated himself on the end of the sofa. "Jun is from Los Angeles. He's on his way home from the army and was good enough to stop by and visit us for a few days. He and Bobbie were

together. Buddies—is that what you say?"

"That's right," said Jun.

"Now, Jun."

"Yes?"

The little man looked at Ichiro and then at his mother, who stared stonily at no one in particular.

"Jun, as a favor to me, although I know it is not easy for you to speak of it, I want you to tell us about Bobbie."

Jun stood up quickly. "Gosh, I don't know." He looked with tender concern at Mrs. Kumasaka.

"It is all right, Jun. Please, just this once more."

"Well, okay." He sat down again, rubbing his hands thoughtfully over his knees. "The way it happened, Bobbie and I, we had just gotten back to the rest area. Everybody was feeling good because there was a lot of talk about the Germans' surrendering. All the fellows were cleaning their equipment. We'd been up in the lines for a long time and everything was pretty well messed up. When you're up there getting shot at, you don't worry much about how crummy your things get, but the minute you pull back, they got to have inspection. So, we were cleaning things up. Most of us were cleaning our rifles because that's something you learn to want to do no matter how anything else looks. Bobbie was sitting beside me and he was talking about how he was going to medical school and become a doctor—"

A sob wrenched itself free from the breast of the mother whose son was once again dying, and the snow-white head bobbed wretchedly.

"Go on, Jun," said the father.

Jun looked away from the mother and at the picture on the mantel. "Bobbie was like that. Me and the other guys, all we talked about was drinking and girls and stuff like that because it's important to talk about those things when you make it back from the front on your

own power, but Bobbie, all he thought about was going to school. I was nodding my head and saying yeah, yeah, and then there was this noise, kind of a pinging noise right close by. It scared me for a minute and I started to cuss and said, 'Gee, that was damn close,' and looked around at Bobbie. He was slumped over with his head between his knees. I reached out to hit him, thinking he was fooling around. Then, when I tapped him on the arm, he fell over and I saw the dark spot on the side of his head where the bullet had gone through. That was all. Ping, and he's dead. It doesn't figure, but it happened just the way I've said."

The mother was crying now, without shame and alone in her grief that knew no end. And in her bottomless grief that made no distinction as to what was wrong and what was right and who was Japanese and who was not, there was no awareness of the other mother with a living son who had come to say to her you are with shame and grief because you were not Japanese and thereby killed your son but mine is big and strong and full of life because I did not weaken and would not let my son destroy himself uselessly and treacherously.

Ichiro's mother rose and, without a word, for no words would ever pass between them again, went out of the house which was a part of America.

Mr. Kumasaka placed a hand on the rounded back of his wife, who was forever beyond consoling, and spoke gently to Ichiro: "You don't have to say anything. You are truly sorry and I am sorry for you."

"I didn't know," he said pleadingly.

"I want you to feel free to come and visit us whenever you wish. We can talk even if your mother's convictions are different."

"She's crazy. Mean and crazy. Goddamned Jap!" He felt the tears hot and stinging.

"Try to understand her."

Impulsively, he took the little man's hand in his own and held it briefly. Then he hurried out of the house which could never be his own.

His mother was not waiting for him. He saw her tiny figure strutting into the shadows away from the illumination of the street lights and did not attempt to catch her.

As he walked up one hill and down another, not caring where and only knowing that he did not want to go home, he was thinking about the Kumasakas and his mother and kids like Bob who died brave deaths fighting for something which was bigger than Japan or America or the selfish bond that strapped a son to his mother. Bob, and a lot of others with no more to lose or gain than he, had not found it necessary to think about whether or not to go in the army. When the time came, they knew what was right for them and they went.

What had happened to him and the others who faced the judge and said: You can't make me go in the army because I'm not an American or you wouldn't have plucked me and mine from a life that was good and real and meaningful and fenced me in the desert like they do the Jews in Germany and it is a puzzle why you haven't started to liquidate us though you might as well since everything else has been destroyed.

And some said: You, Mr. Judge, who supposedly represent justice, was it a just thing to ruin a hundred thousand lives and homes and farms and businesses and dreams and hopes because the hundred thousand were a hundred thousand Japanese and you couldn't have loyal Japanese when Japan is the country you're fighting and, if so, how about the Germans and Italians that must be just as questionable as the Japanese or we wouldn't be fighting Germany and Italy? Round them up. Take away their homes and cars and beer and spaghetti and throw them in a camp and what do you

think they'll say when you try to draft them into your army of the country that is for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? If you think we're the same kind of rotten Japanese that dropped the bombs on Pearl Harbor, and it's plain that you do or I wouldn't be here having to explain to you why it is that I won't go and protect sons-of-bitches like you, I say you're right and *banzai* three times and we'll sit the war out in a nice cell, thank you.

And then another one got up and faced the judge and said meekly: I can't go because my brother is in the Japanese army and if I go in your army and have to shoot at them because they're shooting at me, how do I know that maybe I won't kill my own brother? I'm a good American and I like it here but you can see that I wouldn't do for me to be shooting at my own brother; even if he went back to Japan when I was two years old and couldn't know him if I saw him, it's the feeling that counts, and what can a fellow do? Besides, my mom and dad said I shouldn't and they ought to know.

And after the fellow with the brother in the army of the wrong country sat down, a tall, skinny one sneered at the judge and said: I'm not going in the army because wool clothes give me one helluva bad time and them O.D. things you make the guys wear will drive me nuts and I'd end up shooting bastards like you which would be too good but then you'd only have to shoot me and I like living even if it's in striped trousers as long as they aren't wool. The judge, who looked Italian and had a German name, repeated the question as if the tall skinny one hadn't said anything yet, and the tall skinny one tried again only, this time, he was serious. He said: I got it all figured out. Economics, that's what I hear this guy with the stars, the general of your army that cleaned the Japs off the coast, got a million bucks for the job. All this bull about us being security risk

and saboteurs and Shinto freaks, that's for the birds and the dumbheads. The only way it figures is the money angle. How much did they give you, judge, or aren't your fingers long enough? Cut me in. Give me a cut and I'll go fight your war single-handed.

Please, judge, said the next one. I want to go in your army because this is my country and I've always lived here and I was all-city guard and one time I wrote an essay for composition about what it means to me to be an American and the teacher sent it into a contest and they gave me twenty-five dollars, which proves that I'm a good American. Maybe I look Japanese and my father and mother and brothers and sisters look Japanese, but we're better Americans than the regular ones because that's the way it has to be when one looks Japanese but is really a good American. We're not like the other Japanese who aren't good Americans like us. We're more like you and the other, regular Americans. All you have to do is give us back our home and grocery store and let my kid brother be all-city like me. Nobody has to know. We can be Chinese. We'll call ourselves Chin or Yang or something like that and it'll be the best thing you've ever done, sir. That's all, a little thing. Will you do that for one good, loyal American family? We'll forget the two years in camp because anybody can see it was all a mistake and you didn't really mean to do it and I'm all yours.

There were others with reasons just as flimsy and unreal and they had all gone to prison, where the months and years softened the unthinking bitterness and let them see the truth when it was too late. For the one who could not go because Japan was the country of his parents' birth, there were a thousand Bobs who had gone into the army with a singleness of purpose. In answer to the tall, skinny one who spouted economics, another thousand with even greater losses had answered

the greetings. For each and every refusal based on sundry reasons, another thousand chose to fight for the right to continue to be Americans because homes and cars and money could be regained but only if they first regained their rights as citizens, and that was everything.

And then Ichiro thought to himself: My reason was all the reasons put together. I did not go because I was weak and could not do what I should have done. It was not my mother, whom I have never really known. It was me, myself. It is done and there can be no excuse. I remember Kenzo, whose mother was in the hospital and did not want him to go. The doctor told him that the shock might kill her. He went anyway, the very next day, because though he loved his mother he knew that she was wrong, and she did die. And I remember Harry, whose father had a million-dollar produce business, and the old man just boarded everything up because he said he'd rather let the trucks and buildings and warehouses rot than sell them for a quarter of what they were worth. Harry didn't have to stop and think when his number came up. Then there was Mr Yamaguchi, who was almost forty and had five girls. They would never have taken him, but he had to go and talk himself into a uniform. I remember a lot of people and a lot of things now as I walk confidently through the night over a small span of concrete which is part of the sidewalks which are part of the city which is part of the state and the country and the nation that is America. It is for this that I meant to fight, only the meaning got lost when I needed it most badly.

Then he was on Jackson Street and walking down the hill. Through the windows of the drugstore, the pool hall, the cafés and taverns, he saw groups of young Japanese wasting away the night as nights were meant to be wasted by young Americans with change in the

pockets and a thirst for cokes and beer and pinball machines or fast cars and de luxe hamburgers and cards and dice and trim legs. He recognized a face, a smile, a gesture, or a sneer, but they were not for him, for he walked on the outside and familiar faces no longer meant friends. He walked quickly, guiltily avoiding a chance recognition of himself by someone who remembered him.

Minutes later he was pounding on the door of the darkened grocery store with home in the back. It was almost twelve o'clock and he was surprised to see his father weave toward the door fully dressed and fumble with the latch. He smelled the liquor as soon as he stepped inside. He had known that his father took an occasional drink, but he'd never seen him drunk and it disturbed him.

"Come in, come in," said the father thickly, moments after Ichiro was well inside. After several tries, his father flipped the latch back into place.

"I thought you'd be in bed, Pa."

The old man stumbled toward the kitchen. "Waiting for you, Ichiro. Your first night home. I want to put you to bed."

"Sure. Sure. I know how it is."

They sat down in the kitchen, the bottle between them. It was half empty. On the table was also a bundle of letters. By the cheap, flimsy quality of the envelopes, he knew that they were from Japan. One of the letters was spread out before his father as if he might have been interrupted while perusing it.

"Ichiro." His father grinned kindly at him.

"Yeah?"

"Drink. You have got to drink a little to be a man, you know."

"Sure, Pa." He poured the cheap blend into a water

glass and took a big gulp. "God," he managed to say with the liquor burning a deep rut all the way down, "how can you drink this stuff?"

"Only the first one or two is bad. After that, it gets easier."

Ichiro regarded the bottle skeptically: "You drink all this?"

"Yes, tonight."

"That's quite a bit."

"Ya, but I finish."

"What are you celebrating?"

"Life."

"What?"

"Life. One celebrates Christmas and New Year's and Fourth of July, that is all right, but life I can celebrate any time. I celebrate life." Not bothering with a glass, he gurgled from the bottle.

"What's wrong, Pa?"

The old man waved his arm in a sweeping gesture.

"Nothing is wrong, Ichiro. I just celebrate you. You are home and is it wrong for me to be happy? Of course not. I am happy. I celebrate."

"Things pretty tough?"

"No. No. We don't get rich, but we make enough."

"What do you do with yourself?"

"Do?"

"Yeah. I remember you used to play Go with Mr. Kumasaka all the time. And Ma was always making me run after you to the Tandos. You were never home before the war. You still do those things?"

"Not so much."

"You go and visit them?"

"Once in a while."

He watched his father, who was fiddling with the letter and avoiding his gaze. "Many people think Japan won the war?"

"Not so many."

"What do you think?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I read, I hear, I see."

"Why don't you tell Ma?"

The old man looked up suddenly and Ichiro thought that he was going to burst out with laughter. Just as quickly, he became soberly serious. He held up the thick pile of letters. "Your mama is sick, Ichiro, and she has made you sick and I am sick because I cannot do anything for her and maybe it is I that is somehow responsible for her sickness in the first place. These letters are from my brothers and cousins and nephews and people I hardly knew in Japan thirty-five years ago, and they are from your mama's brother and two sisters and cousins and friends and uncles and people she does not remember at all. They all beg for help, for money and sugar and clothes and rice and tobacco and candy and anything at all. I read these letters and drink and cry and drink some more because my own people are suffering so much and there is nothing I can do."

"Why don't you send them things?"

"Your mama is sick, Ichiro. She says these letters are not from Japan, that they were not written by my brothers or her sisters or our uncles and nephews and aces and cousins. She does not read them any more. Propaganda, she says. She won't let me send money or food or clothing because she says it's all a trick of the Americans and that they will take them. I can send without her knowing, but I do not. It is not for me to say that she is wrong even if I know so."

The father picked up the bottle and poured the liquor to his throat. His face screwed up and tears came to his eyes.

"I'm going to sleep, Pa." Ichiro stood up and looked

for a long time at his drunken father who could not get drunk enough to forget.

"Ichiro."

"Yeah?"

His father mumbled to the table: "I am sorry that you went to prison for us."

"Sure. Forget it." He went to the bedroom, undressed in the dark, and climbed into bed wondering why his brother wasn't sleeping.

2

THERE IS A PERIOD between each night and day when one dies for a few hours, neither dreaming nor thinking nor tossing nor hating nor loving, but dying for a little while because life progresses in just such a way. From that sublime depth, a stranger awakens to strain his eyes into focus on the walls of a strange room. Where am I? he asks himself. There is a fleeting sound of lonely panic as he juggles into order the heavy, sleep-laden pieces of his mind's puzzle. He is frightened because the bed is not his own. He is in momentary terror because the walls are clean and bare and because the sounds are not the sounds of home, and because the chill air of a hotel room fifteen stories above the street is not the same as the furry, stale warmth of a bedroom occupied by three and pierced by the life-giving fragrance of bacon and eggs sizzling in a pan down below. Then he remembers that he is away from home and smiles smugly as he tells himself that home is there waiting for him forever. He goes to the window, expands his chest, and stretches his arms to give vent to the magnitude of his joys upon being alive and happy and at home in a hotel room a hundred miles away, because home is as surely there as if he had never left it.

For Ichiro, there was no intervening span of death to still his great unrest through the darkness of night. It was nine o'clock when he woke up and the bitterness and profanity and hatred and fear did not have to be reawakened. He did not have to ask himself where he

was or why because it did not matter. He was Ichiro who had said no to the judge and had thereby turned his back on the army and the country and the world and his own self. He thought only that he had felt no differently after spending his first night in prison. On that morning, when he woke up and saw the bars, it had not mattered at all that the bars were there. This morning, for the first time in two years, there were no bars, but the fact left him equally unimpressed. The prison which he had carved out of his own stupidity granted no paroles or pardons. It was a prison of forever.

"Ahhhhhh." Out of the filth of his anguished soul, the madness welled forth in a sick and crazy scream, loud enough to be heard in the next room.

"What is it, Ichiro, what is it?" His father hovered hesitantly in the doorway, peering into the blind-drawn gloom of the bedroom with startled eyes.

"Nothing." He felt like crying.

"You are not ill?"

"No."

"Not sick someplace for sure?"

"No, goddammit, I'm fine, Pa, fine."

"That is all right then. I thought something was wrong."

Poor, miserable old fool, he thought. How in the world could he understand? "I'm okay, Pa," he said kindly, "hungry, that's all, hungry and . . . and glad to be home."

"Ya, you get used to it. I cook right away." He smiled, relief flowing to his face, and he turned back hastily into the kitchen.

When he dressed and went through the kitchen to the bathroom, it was his father who stood beside the stove with frying pan in hand. When he came back out and sat at the table, his mother was there.

"Good morning, Ichiro. You slept well?" She sounded cheerful.

The eggs were done the way he liked them, sunny side up with the edges slightly browned. He felt grateful to his father for remembering. "Yeah, I slept pretty good," he answered as he broke the yolks.

"You are pleased to be at home and I am pleased that you are here."

"Sure. I feel like singing."

She sat rigidly with hands palms-down on her lap. "I did not tell you about Kumasaka-san's boy because it was not important."

"Yes, I know."

"Then you understand. It is well."

"No, I don't understand, but it doesn't matter."

"Oh?" Her mouth pressed into a tight little frown.

"What is it you do not understand?"

"A lot of things, a whole lot of things."

"I will tell you. The Germans did not kill Kumasaka-san's boy. It was not he who went to war with a gun and it was not he who was shot by the Germans—"

"Of course not. You heard last night when the fellow told about it. It was an accident."

Patiently, she waited until he had spoken. "Germans, Americans, accident, those things are not important. It was not the boy but the mother who is also the son and it is she who is to blame and it is she who is dead because the son did not know."

"I just know that Bob is dead."

"No, the mother. It is she who is dead because she did not conduct herself as a Japanese and, no longer being Japanese, she is dead."

"And the father? What about Mr. Kumasaka?"

"Yes, dead also."

"And you, Ma? What about you and Pa?"

"We are Japanese as always."

"And me?"

"You are my son who is also Japanese."

"That makes everything all right, does it? That makes it all right that Bob is dead, that war was fought and hundreds of thousands killed and maimed, and that I was two years in prison and am still Japanese?"

"Yes."

"What happens when I'm no longer Japanese?"

"How so?"

"Like Bob, I mean. What happens if I sign up and get shot up like him?"

"Then I will be dead too."

"Dead like me?"

"Yes, I will be dead when you go into the army of the Americans. I will be dead when you *decide* to go into the army of the Americans. I will be dead when you begin to cease to be Japanese and entertain those ideas which will lead you to your decision which will make you go into the army of the Americans. I will be dead long before the bullet strikes you. But you will not go, for you are my son."

"You're crazy." He said it softly and deliberately, for he wanted her to know that he meant it with all the hatred in his soul.

Underneath the table her hands stiffened and jerked a few inches above her lap. Her face revealed only the same little tight frown that he had seen many times before. He waited, hoping that she would scream and rant and cry and denounce him, tearing asunder with fury the slender bond that held them together still, and set him free.

"Ah, Ichiro. I thought for a moment that you meant it."

"I do. I do."

She shrugged without actually moving. "That is what they all say. They who claim to be Japanese. I see it in

their faces and I feel it on their lips. They say I am crazy, but they do not mean it. They say it because they are frightened and because they envy my strength, which is truly the strength of Japan. They say it with the weakness which destroyed them and their sons in a traitorous cause and they say it because they see my strength which was vast enough to be your strength and they did not have enough for themselves and so not enough for their sons."

"Balls!" He leaned across the table, letting the ugliness twist his lips and fill his voice with viciousness. "Balls! Balls!" he shrieked, his face advancing steadily upon hers.

A flicker of surprise, then fear. Yes, he saw it in her eyes in the fraction of an instant before her hands covered them. To the hands which had come forever between them he continued to shriek: "Not your strength, crazy woman, crazy mother of mine. Not your strength, but your madness which I have taken. Look at me!" He gripped her wrists and wrenched them away from her face. "I'm as crazy as you are. See in the mirror the madness of the mother which is the madness of the son. See. See!"

He was halfway to the bathroom door with her when the father rushed in to intervene. "Ichiro, Ichiro," he gasped excitedly as he extended a feeble hand.

With his fury at a sickening peak, Ichiro released the skinny wrists and arced his arm in a wild swing at his father. The mother collapsed limply to the floor and the father, propelled by the painful blow, collided against the wall.

For long moments he stood between them as the anger drained out of his body. He watched his mother rise and go out to the store, her face once again calm and guileless.

"Pa. I'm sorry, Pa." He put his arm around his

father, wanting to hug him like a baby.

"Ya, Ichiro," the old man uttered shakily, "I am sorry too."

"Lost my head, Pa."

"Ya, ya. I know." He got a bottle from the cupboard and drank greedily. Then he sat down and offered the bottle to Ichiro.

The whisky was ugly tasting but it helped to relax him. He looked at his father, who seemed about to cry. "Ah, Pa, Pa. Forget it, won't you? I'm sorry. It just happened."

"Ya, sure." He smiled.

Ichiro felt better. "I've got to do something, Pa. I'll go nuts sitting around."

"Whatever you wish, Ichiro. It will take time. know."

"Where's Freddie?"

"Freddie?"

"Yeah, Akimoto-san's boy. Where do they live?"

"Oh. Freddie. He was . . . yes. On Nineteenth Small, yellow apartment house on the south side."

"I'll go see him. I can talk to him."

"Here, Ichiro," said his father, placing a twenty dollar bill on the table.

"But that's a lot of money, Pa. I won't need all that."

"Take. Take. Go to a movie with Freddie. Eat someplace nice. Have a good time."

"Okay, Pa. Thanks." He pocketed the money and went through the store and on out without looking at his mother.

The small apartment house on the south side was not far from the bus stop. He saw it the minute he got off the bus. He climbed up the shaky stairs and consulted the mailboxes, which told him that the Akimotos occupied 2-B. Although there were only two units on each

floor, six in all, he had to light a match in the dark hallway to see the faded 2-B on the door to the right of the stairway. He knocked softly and waited. When no one answered, he pounded more heavily.

It was the door to 2-A that opened. A plump, young Japanese woman peered into the hall and asked not unkindly: "What you want?"

"I'm looking for Fred Akimoto. He lives here, doesn't he?"

The woman opened the door wider, inspecting him in the added light. Her housecoat was baggy and dirty and unzipped down to her waist. A baby cried far inside. "Freddie's sleeping. He always sleeps late. You can pound on the door until he hears you, or," she grinned at him, "you're really welcome to come sit in my place and wait. Freddie's a good friend of mine."

"Thanks just the same, but I'm kinda anxious to see him."

"Tell Freddie I'll have breakfast for him. You come with him, okay?"

"I'll tell him." He waited until she had closed the door before he started to pound on 2-B again.

Finally he heard noises deep inside the apartment. Footsteps padded reluctantly toward the door and the latch snapped.

"Who is it, for crissake, who is it?" Freddie's lean, sleepy face peered up at him through the crack.

"Hello, Shorty. It's Itchy."

"Itchy boy! They let you out! About time, I say, about time, I say, about time." The door swung wide open and revealed Freddie, small and wiry and tough. He wore a rumpled T-shirt and nothing else.

Ichiro took the other's hand and they shook warmly.

"What time is it?" asked Freddie as they went through the living room and past the kitchen into a bedroom in the back.

"Ten o'clock or thereabouts, I guess."

"No wonder I'm sleepy. How've you been, huh? Whatcha been doin'?"

"Just got home yesterday, Shorty. What have you been doing? Been out pretty near a month, haven't you?"

"Five weeks tomorrow." Freddie dressed hurriedly and sat on the bed beside his guest.

"How's it been?" He was disturbed by Freddie's nonchalance, his air of insuppressible gaiety.

"What's what been?"

"Things. You know what I mean. I've been worried."

Standing up, Freddie whisked through his pockets and found an empty cigarette pack. "Out. Nuts. Got some?"

Ichiro handed over cigarettes and matches and waited until Freddie had lighted up. "Tell me, Shorty. I've got to know."

"Crap! That's what I've been tellin' 'em. I got my life to live and they got theirs. They try to tell me somethin', I tell 'em shit. I'm doin' fine."

"No trouble?"

"Trouble? Why for? You and me, we picked the wrong side. So what? Doesn't mean we gotta stop livin'."

"What have you been doing?"

Freddie looked irritated. "You asked before."

"Well?"

"Livin'. I been havin' a good time. I didn't rot two years without wantin' to catch up."

"What happens after you catch up?"

"Maybe I won't."

Ichiro walked over to the window and lit a cigarette. The alley was littered with rubbish and he saw a cat pawing through a trash can. Sitting on the sill, he

turned again to Freddie. He wanted to talk to Freddie, who used to be a regular worrier. He wanted to get under the new protective shell of brave abandon and seek out the answers which he knew were never really to be buried. "Freddie."

The small, muscular shoulders sagged a little. "Okay, 'Itchy. It's eatin' my guts out too. Is that whatcha wanta hear? Is that why you come to see me? You miserable son of a bitch. Better you shoulda got a Kraut bullet in your balls."

"That bad, is it?"

Freddie looked at Ichiro and in the face of the little man were haggard creases attesting to his lonely struggle. "You know what I done the first week?"

"Tell me."

"Just what I'm doin' now. I sat here on my fanny for a whole week, thinkin'. And I come to a conclusion."

"Yes?"

"I figgered my brains are in my fanny. Same place yours are."

Looking out the window, he saw the cat still searching in the trash can. He chuckled, disappointed because Freddie offered no hope, but at the same time relieved to be assured that he was not the only one floundering in heavy seas.

"The second week," continued Freddie, "I went next door to borrow some smokes. I stayed there all day until the old man came home."

"2-A?"

"Huh?"

"She told me to tell you she'll fix breakfast."

Freddie blushed. "Funny, ain't it? I'm the guy what used to be so damn particular about dames. She's nothin' but a fat pig. Can't get enough of it. Bet she gave you the once over."

"How long do you expect to get away with it? Same

house, same floor. Don't push your luck."

"Aw, can it. I know what you're thinkin'. Me, I don't give a damn. In the meanwhile, I got somethin' to hang on to."

Ichiro pictured little Freddie in bed with the fat woman in 2-A and couldn't resist a smile.

"Sure, funny as hell, but I'll lay you two bits you'll wish you had an anchor like her before the week's out. She don't care who I am or what I done or where I been. All she wants is me, the way I am, with no questions."

"Sure, I see your point."

"No, you don't. Me, I been out and around. I seen Kaz one day. Used to shoot megs together. That's how long I known him. He's goin' to school on the G.I. He was glad as hell to see me. Stuck his hand out, just like that, kinda nervous like. He said somethin' about bein' in a hurry and took off. That's how it is. Either they're in a big, fat rush or they don't know you no more. Great life, huh?"

"I saw Eto."

"That jerk. What'd he do? Spit on you?"

"Yeah, how did you know?"

"We got troubles, but that crud's got more and ain't got sense enough to know it. Six months he was in the army. You know that? Six lousy months and he wangled himself a medical discharge. I been hearin' about him. He ever try that on me, I'll stick a knife in him."

"Maybe he's got a right to."

"Nobody's got a right to spit on you."

Ichiro reached into his pocket and tossed the cigarettes to Freddie, who immediately lit another. "Keep them," he said. "I'll get some on the way home."

"You ain't goin' yet, are you? You just come."

"I'll see you again, Shorty. I want to look around by myself. You know how it is. Maybe catch a bus and ride all over town. I feel like it."

"Sure, sure. Buzz me on the phone. It's in the book. We guys get together every Friday for poker. We can sure use a sixth hand."

"What guys?"

"Guys like you and me. Who else?"

"Oh." He couldn't hide his disappointment, and Freddie noticed it with a frown.

"Give me a little time, Shorty. I'll straighten out."

As he made his way out, Freddie shouted at his back: "You been stewin' about it for two years. How much time you need? Wise up, Itchy, wise up."

ICHIRO STARTED WALKING down Jackson Street, plunging down the hill with quick strides which bore him away from Freddie, who could be of no help to anyone else because he too was alone against the world which he had denounced. He had gone to seek assurance and not having found it had not increased his despair. Freddie was waging a shallow struggle with a to-hell-with-the-rest-of-the-world attitude, and he wasn't being very successful. One could not fight an enemy who looked upon him as much as to say: "This is America, which is for Americans. You have spent two years in prison to prove that you are Japanese—go to Japan!" These unspoken words were not to be denied.

Was it possible that he, striding freely down the street of an American city, the city of his birth and schooling and the cradle of his hopes and dreams, had waved it all aside beyond recall? Was it possible that he and Freddie and the other four of the poker crowd and all the other American-born, American-educated Japanese who had renounced their American-ness in a frightening moment of madness had done so irretrievably? Was there no hope of redemption? Surely there must be. He was still a citizen. He could still vote. He was free to travel and work and study and marry and drink and gamble. People forgot and, in forgetting, forgave. Time would ease the rupture which now separated him from the young Japanese who were Americans because they had fought for America and believed in it. And time would destroy the old Japanese

who, living in America and being denied a place as citizens, nevertheless had become inextricably a part of the country which by its vastness and goodness and fairness and plenitude drew them into its fold, or else they would not have understood why it was that their sons, who looked as Japanese as they themselves, were not Japanese at all but Americans of the country America. In time, he thought, in time there will again be a place for me. I will buy a home and love my family and I will walk down the street holding my son's hand and people will stop and talk with us about the weather and the ball games and the elections. I will take my family to visit the family of Freddie, whom I have just left as I did because time has not yet done its work, and our families together will visit still another family whose father was two years in the army of America instead of two years in prison and it will not matter about the past, for time will have erased it from our memories and there will be only joy and sorrow and sickness, which is the way things should be.

And, as his heart mercifully stacked the blocks of hope into the pattern of an America which would someday hold an unquestioned place for him, his mind said no, it is not to be, and the castle tumbled and was swallowed up by the darkness of his soul, for time might cloud the memories of others but the trouble was inside of him and time would not soften that.

He was at Fourteenth Street where Jackson leveled off for a block before it resumed its gradual descent toward the bay. A bus turned into the stop and he hurled himself into it. There were plenty of seats and he was glad for that because he could not have suffered a crowd. Sitting next to the window and glimpsing the people and houses and automobiles, he gradually felt more at ease. As the bus sped down Jackson Street and made a turn at Fourth to go through downtown, Ichiro

visualized the blocks ahead, picturing in his mind the buildings he remembered and reciting the names of the streets lying ahead, and he was pleased that he remembered so much unerringly.

Not until the bus had traversed the business district and pointed itself toward the northeast did he realize that he was on the same bus which he used to take every morning as a university student. There had been such a time and he vividly brought to mind, with a hunger that he would never lose, the weighty volumes which he had carried against his side so that the cloth of his pants became thin and frayed, and the sandwiches in a brown grocery bag and the slide rule with the leather case which hung from his belt like the sword of learning which it was, for he was going to become an engineer and it had not mattered that Japan would soon be at war with America. To be a student in America was a wonderful thing. To be a student in America studying engineering was a beautiful life. That, in itself, was worth defending from anyone and anything which dared to threaten it with change or extinction. Where was the slide rule, he asked himself, where was the shaft of exacting and thrilling discovery when I needed it most? If only I had pictured it and felt it in my hands, I might well have made the right decision, for the seeing and feeling of it would have pushed out the bitterness with the greenness of the grass on the campus and the hardness of the chairs in the airy classrooms with the blackboards stretched wall-to-wall behind the professor, and the books and the sandwiches and the bus rides coming and going. I would have gone into the army for that and I would have shot and killed, and shot and killed some more, because I was happy when I was a student with the finely calculated white sword at my side. But I did not remember or I could not remember because, when one is born in America and

learning to love it more and more every day without thinking it, it is not an easy thing to discover suddenly that being American is a terribly incomplete thing if one's face is not white and one's parents are Japanese of the country Japan which attacked America. It is like being pulled asunder by a whirling tornado and one does not think of a slide rule though that may be the thing which will save one. No, one does not remember, and so I am not really to blame, but—and still the answer is there unchanged and unchallenged—I did not remember and Freddie did not remember. But Bob did, and his friend, who talks of Bob's dying because the father wishes it, did, and so did a lot of others who had no more or no less reason than I.

The bus stopped at the corner with the fountain lunch where he had had many a hamburger or coke or black coffee in cups that were solid and heavy but did not hold much coffee. From there he walked naturally toward the campus and on up the wide, curving streets which soon branched off into countless narrow walks and drives among countless buildings of Gothic structure which had flying buttresses and pointed arches and piers but failed as authentic Gothic because everyone called it bastard Gothic with laughing familiarity as though the buildings were imperfect children of their own.

As if he had come to the university expressly for the purpose, Ichiro went directly to the offices of the engineering school. He found the name Baxter Brown on the wall directory and proceeded up the stairs to the assistant professor's office in a remote corner of the building which was reached finally by climbing a steep flight of stairs no more than twenty inches wide. By their very narrowness, the stairs seemed to avoid discovery by the mass of students and thereby afforded

the occupant of the office the seclusion to which the learned are entitled.

Mr. Brown, grayer and heavier, sat behind a desk impressively covered with books and journals and papers. He gaped at Ichiro in that vague, suddenly alert way that one instinctively manages when startled unexpectedly from a dozing mood.

"Professor Brown?" He knew it was Professor Brown and he hadn't meant to make it a question.

The professor wrenched himself out of his chair and came forth energetically with extended arm. "Yes, yes, have a chair."

He sat and waited until the professor got behind the desk. "I guess you don't remember me. It's been some time since I was one of your students."

"Of course I remember. I knew the moment you stepped inside. Let me think now. No, no, don't tell me." The professor studied him thoughtfully. "You're Su . . . Suzu . . . no . . . Tsuji . . ."

"It's Yamada. Ichiro Yamada."

"That's it. Another minute and I would have had it. How are you, Mr. Yamada?"

"Fine, sir."

"Good. Lot of you fellows coming back. Everything all right?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. Tough about the evacuation. I really hated to see it happen. I suppose you're disturbed about it."

"No, sir. Not too much, that is."

"Of course you are. Who wouldn't be? Families uprooted, businesses smashed, educations interrupted. You've got a right to be sore."

"Water under the bridge now."

Professor Brown smiled and leaned back in his chair, relaxing. "Admire you for saying that. You fellows are

as American as I am. And you've proved it. That outfit in Italy. Greatest there ever was. You were there too, I suppose?"

"No, I—"

"Over in the Pacific then? Interrogating prisoners I bet."

"Well, no. You see—"

"Sure. We can't all get in. I was in the first one myself. Did some consulting work for the navy this last one, but as a civilian. Still, every bit helps. Good to see you're thinking about coming back to the university."

Relieved to get off the touchy matter of war and who was in it and who wasn't and, if not, why and so on until it was too late to turn and run, Ichiro spoke quickly: "Yes, sir, I'm thinking seriously about it. It'll probably take me a little time to adjust myself . . ."

"Everybody worries about that. No point to it. It'll come back in no time at all. You just pick up where you left off and you won't have any trouble. I've talked plenty of fellows out of repeating courses because they think they've forgotten so much and, you know, they all come back and thank me for it. You fellows are older and you've matured and you know what you want. Makes a whale of a difference, I'll tell you. You haven't forgotten a thing—not a thing. It'll be there when you need it. Take my word for it."

"If you say so, but—"

"I say so. What were you in? Double E? Mechanical? Civil?"

"Civil."

"Makes no difference, really. Big opportunities in any branch. Too bad you're late for this quarter."

"Yes."

"Well," Professor Brown stood up and extended his hand, "nice seeing you again. Drop in any time."

Ichiro took the hand and while being ushered to the

door muttered something about the professor's being good enough to spend time with him. Outside the office and alone again, he went down the narrow stairs and hurried outside.

That wasn't the way I wanted it to happen, he thought. What happened? He was nice enough. Shook hands, talked, smiled. Still, it was all wrong. It was like meeting someone you knew in a revolving door, you going one way and the friend going the other. You smiled, maybe shouted "Hi" and then you were outside and he was swallowed up by the building. It was seeing without meeting, talking without hearing, smiling without feeling. We didn't talk about the weather at all only that's what it felt like all the way through. Was it him or was it me? Him or me? He or I? Brown or Itchy? It wasn't Brown, of course. Brown was heavier, his hair grayer, but he was still Brown of the engineering school of the university of the world of students and slide rules and he was Brown then and now of that tiny office with the books and papers which was cut off from the rest of the world by the narrow stairs which one would not think to climb unless he was six and curious and thought that the stairs led to the roof and the big blue sky. No, Brown is still Brown. It is I who reduces conversation to the inconsequential because Brown is of that life which I have forfeited and, forfeiting it, have lost the right to see and hear and become excited over things which are of that wonderful past.

And then he crossed the street and did not look back at the buildings and students and curved lanes and grass which was the garden in the forsaken land. He felt empty and quietly sad and hungry.

He was halfway through his second hamburger, sitting on the stool at the counter, when Kenji placed a hand on his shoulder.

Ichiro turned and looked into the smiling face, the pleasant, thoughtful, old face of Kenji, who was also twenty-five.

"Ichiro, is it not?" It was said softly, much more softly than he had known the shy, unassuming Kenji to speak.

"Yes, and you're Ken."

"Same one. At least, what's left of me," said Kenji, shifting the cane from his right to his left hand and shaking with Ichiro.

So Kenji had gone too. Or had he? He hoped that it was an automobile accident or something else that had brought on the injury which necessitated the cane and inspired the remark. "Join me, Ken. We can talk," he said, displaying his hamburger.

"I've already had lunch, but I'll go for another coffee." The stools were high, and he had to hook his cane to the counter and lift himself up with both arms.

"Going to school?"

"Yes, I guess you could call it that." The waitress came and he ordered coffee, black.

"What does that mean?"

"I'm enrolled. I go when I feel like it and most of the time I don't. How about you?"

"No. Just looking around."

"Feel the same?"

"How's that?"

"Things. You've probably been walking around the campus, trying to catch the same smells and sounds and the other things which you've been thinking about all the time the government kept you away from Seattle. Is it still the same? Can you start back to school tomorrow and pick up just where you left off?"

"No, it's not the same and I'm not going back."

"Why?"

"Well, because it's not the same. Or rather, I'm not

the same."

Kenji sipped his coffee gingerly. "So what are your plans?"

"Haven't got any."

"That makes it nice."

"Does it?"

"Sure."

"Why?"

"I haven't any either."

They left the café and walked slowly to Kenji's car, for Kenji could not hurry on his bad leg, which was stiff and awkward and not like his own at all. Ichiro felt he should ask about it but could not bring himself to do so.

The new Oldsmobile was parked by a meter with the flag up to indicate that the time had expired. There was a ticket on the windshield, which Kenji removed with the rubber tip of his cane. The pink ticket floated down and under the car.

"Is that the way to do it?"

"My way."

"Get away with it?"

"Sometimes."

They got in and started down the street. Ichiro sniffed the new upholstery and touched a finger to the shiny, spotless dash. "New?"

"Yes."

"These things must cost a fortune these days."

"It's a present."

"Must be a nice guy," he said, remembering Kenji's father, who had known only poverty and struggle after his wife died leaving six children.

"He is. Uncle Sam."

Ichiro turned so that he could see Kenji better and he saw the stiff leg extended uselessly where the gas pedal should have been but wasn't because it and the brake pedal had been rearranged to accommodate the good

left leg.

"I was in, Ichiro, mostly in hospitals. I got this for being a good patient."

"I see."

"It wasn't worth it." He started to slow down for a red light and, seeing it turn green, pressed on the accelerator. The car responded beautifully, the power in the engine throwing the vehicle forward with smooth effort.

Ichiro looked out at the houses, the big, roomy houses of brick and glass which belonged in magazines and were of that world which was no longer his to dream about. Kenji could still hope. A leg more or less wasn't important when compared with himself, Ichiro, who was strong and perfect but only an empty shell. He would have given both legs to change places with Kenji.

"Am I a hero?"

"What?"

"They gave me a medal, too. Ever hear of the Silver Star?" Kenji was talking to him and, yet, he was talking to himself. Ichiro felt drawn to the soft-spoken veteran who voluntarily spoke of things that the battle-wise and battle-scarred were thought not to discuss because they had been through hell and hell was not a thing which a man kept alive in himself. If Eto had been a brave man, if Eto had been wounded and given a medal, he would have dramatized his bravery to any and all who could be cornered into listening, but he was not a brave man and so he would never have gone into battle and displayed the sort of courage of which one might proudly speak.

There was no trace of the braggart as Kenji continued: "A medal, a car, a pension, even an education. Just for packing a rifle. Is that good?"

"Yes, it's good."

Kenji turned and watched him long enough to make

him feel nervous.

"Better watch the road," he warned.

"Sure." Kenji looked through the windshield and bit his lower lip thoughtfully.

"Ken."

"Yes?"

"Tell me about it."

The small man behind the wheel raised the leg which was not his own and let it fall with a thud to the floor board. "About this?"

"If you will. If it isn't too painful."

"No, it's not painful at all. Talking about it doesn't hurt. Not having it doesn't hurt. But it hurts where it ought to be. Sometimes I think about killing myself."

"Why?" There was anger in his voice.

"What makes you say why that way?"

"I didn't mean it to sound the way it did."

"Of course you did. I don't say that about killing myself to everybody. Sometimes it scares people. Sometimes it makes them think I'm crazy. You got angry right away and I want to know why."

"Tell me about it first."

"Sure." He turned the car into a park and drove slowly along a winding road, with trees and neat, green grass on both sides of them. "It's not important how I lost the leg. What's important are the eleven inches."

"I don't understand that about the eleven inches."

"That's what's left."

"I see."

"Do you? Do you really, Ichiro?"

"I think so."

A mother and a child strolled across the road ahead of them and Kenji slowed down more than necessary. "What I mean is, I've got eleven inches to go and you've got fifty years, maybe sixty. Which would you rather have?"

"I don't quite follow you, but I'll settle for eleven inches."

"Oh?" Kenji was surprised.

Ichiro regarded the thin, sensitive face carefully and said bluntly: "I wasn't in the army, Ken. I was in jail. I'm a no-no boy."

There was a silence, but it wasn't uncomfortable. Ichiro could tell instantly that it did not matter to Kenji, who drove the new Oldsmobile aimlessly through the park because it was as good a place as any.

"Still," he said finally, "you've got your life ahead of you."

"Have I?"

"I should think so."

"Would you trade places with me? I said I would with you."

Kenji laughed softly. "I'll forget you said that."

"No, I meant it."

"Let me tell you about the eleven inches first."

"I'm listening."

Rolling down the window, Kenji let the cool air blow in on them. "Turned out to be a pretty nice day."

Ichiro waited without answering.

"The doctors didn't have to work too hard. The machine gun had done a pretty good job. They were pretty proud about having saved my knee. Makes things a lot easier with a sound knee, you know."

"Yes, that's not hard to see."

"They gave me a leg and it worked out pretty well, only, after a while, it started to hurt. I went back into the hospital and it turned out that there's something rotten in my leg that's eating it away. So they cut off a little more and gave me a new leg. As you've probably guessed by now, it wasn't long before I was back in and they whacked off another chunk. This time they took off more than they had to so as to make sure they got all

the rottenness. That was five months ago. A couple of days ago I noticed the pains coming back."

"Bad?"

"No, but it's starting."

"Does that mean . . ."

"Yes. I'll go back and they'll chop again. Then, maybe, I'll only have eight inches to trade for your fifty or sixty years."

"Oh."

"Still want to trade?"

Ichiro shuddered and Kenji rolled up the window.

"How much time do they give you?"

"Depends, of course. Maybe the rottenness will go away and I'll live to a ripe old age."

"If not?"

"They say a fellow ought to trade in a car every third year to get the most out of it. My brother can take care of that."

"How long?"

"Two years at the most."

"You'll get well. They've got ways."

"Let's talk about something else," said Kenji and drove faster until they were out of the park and once again headed toward Jackson Street.

They didn't talk, because there was nothing to say. For a brief moment Ichiro felt a strange exhilaration. He had been envying Kenji with his new Oldsmobile, which was fixed to be driven with a right leg that wasn't there any more, because the leg that wasn't there had been amputated in a field hospital, which meant that Kenji was a veteran of the army of America and had every right to laugh and love and hope, because one could do that even if one of his legs was gone. But a leg that was eating itself away until it would consume the man himself in a matter of a few years was something else, for hobbling toward death on a cane and one good

leg seemed far more disastrous than having both legs and an emptiness that might conceivably still be filled.

He gripped his knees with his hands, squeezing the hard soundness of the bony flesh and muscles, and fought off the sadness which seemed only to have deepened after the moment of relief. Kenji had two years, maybe a lifetime if the thing that was chewing away at him suddenly stopped. But he, Ichiro, had stopped living two years ago.

I'll change with you, Kenji, he thought. Give me the stump which gives you the right to hold your head high. Give me the eleven inches which are beginning to hurt again and bring ever closer the fear of approaching death, and give me with it the fullness of yourself which is also yours because you were man enough to wish the thing which destroyed your leg and, perhaps, you with it but, at the same time, made it so that you can put your one good foot in the dirt of America and know that the wet coolness of it is yours beyond a single doubt.

"I like you, Ichiro," said Kenji, breaking the silence.

Ichiro smiled, a little embarrassed. "I could say the same about you," he said.

"We've both got big problems, bigger than most people. That ought to mean something."

"Whose is bigger?"

"Huh?"

"I was thinking all the time we were silent and I decided that, were it possible, I might very well trade with you."

"For the eleven inches or for the seven or eight that'll be left after the next time?"

"Even for two inches."

"Oh." They were getting close to Ichiro's home and Kenji took his time as if reluctant to part with his friend.

Soon, however, they were in front of the grocery store.

"Well?" asked Ichiro, opening the door.

"Mine is bigger than yours in a way and, then again, yours is bigger than mine."

"Thanks for the lift," he said and climbed out onto the sidewalk.

"I'll pick you up tonight if you got nothing better to do," said Kenji.

"That'll be fine."

He watched the Oldsmobile pull away and then pushed open the door which jingled the bell of the grocery store with home in the back end.

His mother was at the counter ringing up a loaf of bread and a bag of Bull Durham for a white-haired pensioner. She glanced briefly at him, her eyes sharp and troubled. Feeling uneasy, he made his way past her into the kitchen.

Taro was playing solitaire at the kitchen table, his hands mechanically flipping and shifting the cards as if he found no enjoyment in the game. The father sat opposite his younger son and watched, not the cards, but the face of his son, with a kind of helpless sadness.

He sat on the end between them and watched for awhile.

"No school?" he said finally, noticing that it was still only a little after one o'clock.

"Keep out of it." His brother spit the words out angrily without taking his eyes off the cards.

Ichiro looked at his father with the unanswered question on his face and failed still to get an answer because the father did not remove his gaze from Taro.

"You will wait, ya? Please, Taro. It is not long."

He turned up the ace of spades and piled several cards in rapid succession upon it.

His mouth still open, the father forced more words out of it: "Mama does not understand, Taro, so you must understand her. Try. Try to understand. Until

June. Then, if she still says no, you go. Anyway, finish high school."

"What's going on?" Ichiro looked from Taro to his father and back again and got no reply.

"That is all right, ya? June, you finish high school. Then, if you still feel the same, I will say nothing. Only a few months. Okay?"

The old man sighed, the weight of the problem noticeably too much for him. "Ahh," he groaned, then "Ahh" once more. He rose and got the bottle from the cupboard and wet his throat amply. After only a slight pause he took a second, shorter drink and returned the bottle to the shelf. Seconds later, he was back in the chair looking at Taro in the same lost fashion.

Ichiro tried again: "What's going on?"

"Birthday party," said Taro, looking up with a wry grin. "You gonna sing for me too?"

"I might."

"Sure, you can get your buddies from the pen and do it right. You can sing me happy birthday in Japanese. I'd go for that."

The blood rushed to his face and it was with considerable difficulty that he kept himself from swinging at his brother. "You hate me that much?"

"I don't know you." He shifted the diamond six to a club seven and put up the seven of spades.

"Ichiro," said the old man and he still did not take his eyes away from the other son.

"Yeah?"

"Taro is eighteen today. He came home at lunch-time, when he should be in school. Mama said: 'Why are you home?' 'It is my birthday,' he said. 'Why are you home?' said Mama, 'why are you not in school like you should be?' 'I am eighteen and I am going in the army,' he said. We were eating, Mama and me, and Taro stood here beside us and said: 'I am eighteen and I am

going in the army.'"

"Are you?" he asked his brother.

"For crissake. You want me to write it down? You want me to send you a letter? I said I'm goin' in the army. You think the old man's just talkin'? Besides, it's none a your business." Extracting a red ten from the discard pile, he played it on a black jack, which enabled him to make several advantageous moves.

"You realize Ma won't get over it, don't you?"

"It doesn't matter."

The answer did not disturb him. If he were eighteen and in Taro's shoes he would probably do the same thing. And not having done it when it was his to do, there was really nothing for him to say. It was not Taro who was rejecting them, but it was he who had rejected Taro and, in turn, had made him a stranger to his own parents forever.

"Think it over," he said weakly, "give it time."

Taro threw the cards in his hand on the table and swept them onto the floor with an angry sweep of his arm. "It's been nice," he said and he might have been on the verge of tears. "I got things to do." He stood and looked down at Ichiro, wanting to speak but not finding the words in himself to tell his brother that he had to go in the army because of his brother whose weakness made it impossible for him to do otherwise and because he did not understand what it was about his mother that haunted him day and night and pulled his insides into meaningless bits and was slowly destroying him. And it was because of these things and because he was furiously mixed up that he had to cut himself free and spare himself the anguish of his brother which he knew must be there even if he was a stranger to him, and maybe that was still another reason why he was going.

In that brief moment when Taro looked at Ichiro and

felt these things which he could not say, Ichiro felt them too and understood. So, when Taro stalked into the bedroom and banged the drawers and packed a small bag, he felt the heaviness lifting from his own shoulders. He did not even turn to look when Taro swept past him on the way out, for he saw in the fearful eyes of the father the departure of the son who was not a son but a stranger and, perhaps more rightly, an enemy leaving to join his friends. Then the bell tinkled to signal the opening of the door and it tinkled again as the door closed and shut them off from the world that Taro had entered.

The mother uttered a single, muffled cry which was the forgotten spark in a dark and vicious canyon and, the spark having escaped, there was only darkness, but a darkness which was now darker still, and the meaning of her life became a little bit meaningless.

Ichiro looked at his father, who did not look as would a father who had just lost a son, but as a man afraid. His face paled perceptibly as the mother came into the kitchen.

"Mama," said the father, and he might have been a boy the way he said it.

"We don't have enough nickels," she said, trying to sound the way she would have sounded if Taro had never been born, but it was not the same and Ichiro felt it.

"Ya, I get," the father almost shouted as he jumped up. "The bank will still be open." He threw on his overcoat and hastily departed.

Ichiro started to pick the cards off the floor and felt his mother's eyes on him. He took his time purposely, not wanting to look at her, for the strength that was the strength of Japan had failed and he had caught the realization of it in the cry and in the words which she had spoken. As if suddenly sensing what was in his mind, she quickly turned and left him alone.

THERE ARE STORES on King Street, which is one block to the south of Jackson Street. Over the stores are hotels housed in ugly structures of brick more black than red with age and neglect. The stores are cafés and open-faced groceries and taverns and dry-goods-shops, and then there are the stores with plate-glass windows painted green or covered with sun-faded drapes. Some bear names of exporting firms, others of laundries with a few bundles on dusty shelves. A few come closer to the truth by calling themselves society or club headquarters. The names of these latter are simple and unimaginative, for gambling against the house, whether it be with cards or dice or beans or dominoes, requires only a stout heart and a hunger for the impossible. And there are many of these, for this is Chinatown and, when the town is wide open, one simply walks into Wing's Hand Laundry, or Trans-Asia Exporting, Inc., or Canton Recreation Society with the stout heart and the hunger and there is not even a guard at the massive inner door with the small square of one-way glass.

Inside the second door are the tables and the stacks of silver dollars and the Chinese and Japanese and Filipinos and a few stray whites, and no one is smiling or laughing, for one does not do those things when the twenty has dwindled to a five or the twenty is up to a hundred and the hunger has been whetted into a mild frenzy by greed. The dealer behind the blackjack table is a sickly, handsome Chinese, a pokerfaced dignitary